

Presentation

Agenda Item #	2
Meeting Date	22 November 2004
Prepared By	Sara Anne Daines ECD Director
Approved By	Barbara B. Matthews City Manager

Discussion Item	Community Mural Presentation of Arts and Humanities Commission
Background	<p>The Takoma Park Arts and Humanities Commission (AHC) will make a brief presentation to the Council, providing an update on the status of its cultural master plan and community survey. A copy of the Community Mural Project poster will be presented to the Mayor and each of the Councilmembers.</p> <p>The Chair of the Commission, Randy Cohen, will make the presentation.</p>
Policy	To support the expansion of public awareness of, involvement in, and access to the arts and arts opportunities.
Fiscal Impact	None
Attachments	GAZETTE.NET article - March 17, 2004
Recommendation	No formal action required
Special Consideration	

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Arts effort kicks off with Murals

by Sean Sands

Staff Writer

Mar. 17, 2004

The intersection of Philadelphia and Maple avenues in Takoma Park is about to get a colorful new look, just in time for spring.

The city's Arts and Humanities Commission will unveil its first major community art project at the intersection Saturday, installing a series of 30 panels to create a community mural intended to liven up the community center construction site and draw people back to the heart of the city.

"It's vintage Takoma Park with tremendous involvement from the community," Randy Cohen, chairman of the commission, said of the project. "It's going to bring beauty to our city center, and I think it's going to attract people back to the Municipal Building. "It will let people know that the area is still alive and still happening."

The mural will consist of 30 4-foot-square panels installed on the lawn next to the Takoma Park Maryland Library. Various groups from Takoma Park and the surrounding area created panels for the mural, with Duron Paint and Strosniders Hardware donating the supplies.

The groups involved include schools, civic associations, Girl Scout troops and youth and senior programs. It's the diversity of the groups -- both in terms of their geographical spread across the wider Takoma Park community and their community involvement -- that makes the project so special, Cohen said.

"Projects like a community mural involve segments of the entire community," he said. "I was actually very surprised at the amount of response we got -- we thought this would be a smaller project, quite frankly, with maybe a dozen panels."

One of the area schools participating is the Takoma Park Cooperative Nursery School, where Head Teacher Lesley Romanoff said both students and parents enthusiastically embraced the project. There was so much support, in fact, that the school created two panels: one from the Leaf Class of 3- and 4-year-olds, and one from the Tracks Class of 4- and 5-year-olds.

Working on the mural has been a special experience for the students, Romanoff said, noting that this is their first venture into a community-wide collaborative art project. And when the students see their work at the unveiling Saturday, "they will get the sense of community. ...They felt the process, but when they see it with everybody else's, it will be awesome for them."

Saturday's unveiling, scheduled for 2 p.m. at the Municipal Building, 7500 Maple Ave., will include live jazz, free refreshments and a proclamation from Mayor Kathy Porter declaring "Arts and Humanities Day" in the city.

But perhaps more importantly, the event also marks the arts commission's first project since the City Council created it a year ago. Cohen said that while the commissioners are working on bringing the mural to life, they also are undertaking another important task: creating the city's first cultural master plan.

The commission's formation "was really the city's way to recognize that a creative and diverse cultural environment is essential to its continued vitality and well-being," Cohen said, noting that Takoma Park has more than 25 cultural organizations and hundreds of artists. "We have the responsibility of ensuring that all residents have an opportunity to participate in the arts and humanities.

"It's access: all the arts for all the people," he said.

Commission members are preparing to conduct research, including Internet-based polls and focus groups, to determine what type of arts and humanities programs city residents would like to see. The goal, Cohen said, is to have the community cultural plan finished and ready for City Council review by the end of the year.

The group received \$5,000 from the city, and Cohen said the 15 commission members are already putting their own "sweat equity" into both the community mural project and the development of the cultural master plan. Members are working to solicit feedback.

Sara Daines, the city's community development director, said an arts and humanities master plan would benefit both city residents and city employees involved in arts programming.

"It will be reinforcing what we all kind of instinctively know, that the arts are important in Takoma Park," she said. But the plan also will provide the City Council with a framework for making decisions about arts- and humanities-related topics, especially in terms of funding programs for city residents.

"Residents will benefit from more direct interaction and direct programming than the [county's] arts and humanities commissions can provide," she said.

That's not to say that local arts commissioners won't be working closely with members of the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County. Cohen said the executive director of the county's group actually helped get the city's group established.

"It will be very important that whatever the outcomes are, we don't overlap strategies," Cohen said of how the two groups would work together. "We'll work with them very strategically – it's not going to be a case of the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing."